WARLOCK
10
THE MAGOCRACIES

WARLOCK

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Five Reasons We Have Reached 10 Warlocks

I confess to a certain hand-rubbing glee that Warlock has actually made it into double digits. There were some serious doubts about it around, say, #1, #2, and even #3. We stuck it out, but to be clear, the odds against a particular series doing well are always somewhat suspect, especially for a niche idea like Dark Fantasy for 5th Edition. But… this particular one has had several things going for it, and I'd like to recognize them right here because Warlock would not have made it this far without them all.

1) **Timing**: Let's be honest and admit some of it was luck. Warlock arrived just about the time Critical Role and 5th Edition were both going huge. It did not hurt to support 5th Edition #DnD when it was catching fire.

2) **A Savvy Editor**: Scott Gable may be a modest man with a deep appreciation of Mythos-inflected fiction and a complete collection of Lovecraft Film Festival memorabilia. He's also a damn fine editor and has kept this show running.

3) **Keen Eyed Art Direction**: Marc Radle basically got the note that said, "Find some great black & white art. Fast." And he delivered. We're not sure how. Some questions are better not asked.

4) **Amazing Writers and Artists**: Like all group efforts of creativity, someone's slinging the ink and clacking the keys. Our designers include super-talented Kobold Press regulars, new voices, and old hands who still occasionally leave the barn for a gallop through the hedgerows where the hills rise wild. And the artists, well Karl Waller was an early favorite, but the newcomers are keeping his game evolving. Well done, ink-slingers!

5) **Devoted Patrons**: Your financial support and social media shout-outs both make this 'zine possible every 55 days or so. Thank you, one and all, for letting the kobolds run amok a bit with art, in-depth lore, and some occasionally weird and nostalgic spells.

I hope we survive to Warlock 20 sometime in late 2020. Sure, we're kobolds and massive casualties are just part of our survival strategy, but with such a great community, I think we've got a chance.

With deep appreciation,

Wolfgang Baur
Publisher, Kobold Press

Debris of the Great Mage Wars

by Ben McFarland

The departure of the elves and the resulting conflict shaped Central Midgard in fundamental ways. At its core, the Great Mage Wars rise out of the hubris of the Fulgurate Society and leave behind a monument to humanity's capability for destructive spite.

Legacy of the Fulgurate Society

It began as a joke, a thumbing of their collective noses at the Elvish Empire of Valeran, the snide comments about humans being "all thunder and no lightning," when the Founding Circle of the Fulgurate Society chose their name in a secret gathering atop an old imperial tower. But from those humble beginnings, nine arcane spellcasters went on to carve out nations of humanity built on a foundation of great skill and art. The magocracies quickly achieved a begrudged parity with the Elvish Imperium, fueled by potent works and no lack of ambition. Initially, they strove to make their endeavors beautiful, functional, grand, and robust. Their spells pushed boundaries, their construction left one breathlessly awestruck, and the Fulgurate Society grew to serve as part of their shared heritage, an informal social organization, helping to avert misunderstandings and allowing backchannel communications. They labored to cease hostilities by denying access to those powers who overstepped treaties and by undoing the machinations of the treacherous mages who disobeyed their edicts or neglected unspoken rules and codes between their respective territories. Unfortunately, the Fulgurate Society was only human, and flaws of tangled emotion and spurned feelings eroded the foundations of their wondrous achievements. Resentment and jealousy festered, and as the Great Retreat concluded, the magocracies turned upon each other before a season had passed, attempting to claim the remnant vacuum.

Initially, in the wake of Luz's Escalation and the resulting Slumber of the Isonade, each magocracy controlled a Dread Walker, but the devastation left in their wake, combined with the ruthless spell effects of the great magi, embittered many. The destruction of Molovosch particularly weighed upon Enkada Pishtuhk, one of the more powerful and prominent members, and in the next gathering of the Fulgurate Society, supposedly in a declaration of vengeance related to a lost love, he utilized the nexus of ley lines once centered on the Lost Tower to summon Pah'draguusthlai while sinking the tower and its Glyph Stair perpendicular to reality. The resulting

destruction of Uxloon suggests truth in the rumor. The magocracies fought for two full years after that betrayal before members finally managed the massive ritual invocation locking the remaining Walkers in their current dreaming stumble. However, the damage was complete; the glory and potential of the magocracies lay burnt from the land, leaving the smoldering cinder of the Wasted West and a few mystical heirlooms left to be discovered, in secret caches of scrolls and manuscripts, by the intrepid, persistent, and lucky.

SPELLCRAFT OF THE LOST MAGOCRACIES

Presented below are a few lost secrets of the scions of Vael Turog.

TALONS OF A HUNGRY LAND

7th-level evocation (sorcerer, warlock, wizard)
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You cause three parallel lines of thick, flared obsidian spikes to erupt from the ground. They appear within range on a solid surface, last for the duration, and provide three-quarters cover to creatures behind them. You can make lines (up to 60 feet long, 10 feet high, and 5 feet thick) or form a circle (20 feet in diameter, up to 15 feet high and 5 feet thick). The lines provide three-quarters cover to creatures behind them.

When the lines appear, each creature within their area must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 8d8 slashing damage or half as much damage on a successful save.

A creature can move through the lines at the risk of cutting themselves on the exposed edges. For every 1 foot a creature moves through the lines, it must spend 4 feet of movement. Furthermore, the first time a creature enters the lines on a turn or ends its turn there, the creature must make a Dexterity saving throw. It takes 8d8 slashing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

When you cease concentrating on the spell, you may cause the obsidian spikes to explode, causing 5d8 slashing to any creature within 15 feet or half as much damage on a successful Dexterity save.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, the damage from all effects of the lines increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 7th.

VENGEFUL PANOPY OF THE LEY LINE IGNITED

6th-level evocation (ley line; sorcerer, warlock, wizard)
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: self
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

While bound to a ley line, you draw directly from its power, becoming cloaked in a magical heliotropic fire that sheds dim light in a 10-foot radius. Additionally, each round, including the round it is cast, you may make a ranged spell attack as an action. On a hit, the target takes 6d6 force damage. Every 3 minutes the effect is active, your bond with the ley line is reduced by one step; a bond to a Titanic ley line becomes effectively a Strong, then a Weak, and after 10 minutes, the bond is broken. The strength of the bond is only restored after a long rest; if the bond was broken, it can only be restored at the next weakest level for a week. A bond broken from a Weak ley line cannot be restored for two weeks. Some believe this spell damages ley lines, pointing to the lack of ley lines in the Wasted West as proof. Bemmea forbids this spell; its use is punishable by death of one's lineage, defined as the spellcaster along with any spellcaster ever apprenticed to the

punished spellcaster or to an apprentice of the punished spellcaster.

Additionally, whenever a creature within 5 feet hits you with a melee attack, the cloak erupts with a heliotropic flare. The attacker takes 3d6 force damage.

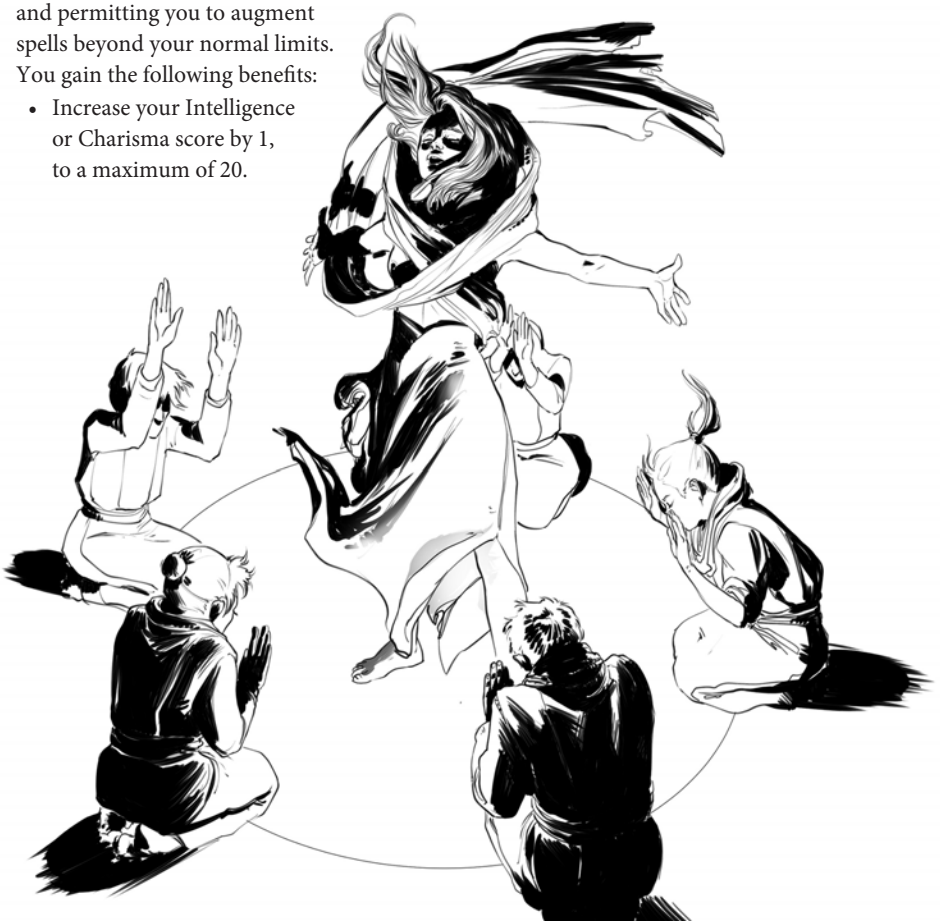
At Higher Levels. When casting this spell using a spell slot of 6th level, the damage from all effects of the spell increase by 1d6 for each slot level above 6th.

Feat: Cooperative Caster

Prerequisite: Ability to cast one arcane spell.

You have discovered secrets of the lost magocracies, learning how to pool your magical might with allied arcane casters and permitting you to augment spells beyond your normal limits. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence or Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You can spend 2 hours, including during a long rest, creating a mystical mental bond with a number of other spellcasters equal to your proficiency bonus minus 1. You and the other involved spellcasters must spend this time in meditation, and you must remain within 10 feet of each other. Once the mental bond is formed, you may move beyond 10 feet from each other and work together to bolster each other's magic. When one of you casts a spell that benefits from being cast at a higher level, you may use any bonded spellcaster's level to determine the



benefits (up to twice your level), or if the spell would benefit from being cast at a higher slot, any of the other bonded spellcasters may use their reaction to sacrifice spell slots of any level to create the final effect. The sum of these sacrificed slots may not exceed 9th level for spells of 4th level or less and may not exceed twice the level for spells of 5th to 9th level. This bond may be dispelled and is treated as having a level equal to half your level minus 1 (minimum 1); if it is dispelled, each bonded member suffers 4d6 psychic damage from the strain. If a bonded member dies, each other member suffers 2d6 psychic damage. You may only have one active bonding at a time; if you create a new bonding, the previous bond breaks. Otherwise, it lasts until the end of your next long rest.

Story Seed: ***The Sins of the Master.*** After receiving a book detailing cooperative casting and the spell *vengeful panoply of the ley line ignited*, summoned creatures and bounty hunters begin attacking the group's arcane caster. The masters of the School of Exalted Magics in Bemmea discovered the spellcaster's great-grand-master, now thrice-removed but living in Bemmea, casting the banned spell, and enacted the Edict of Lineage's Death. The group must travel to Bemmea and clear the group member's reputation before the Arcane Magistrate or face deadly hunters for the rest of their lives!

Relics of the War

The sentries laughed from the high walls of many-spired Andarre when archmage N'Lok-Thrang stood before their gates barefoot and disheveled, innocently suggesting the prudence of the city's immediate surrender—to him. Within hours, the guards lay glassy-eyed silent, and many-spired Andarre smoldered, a noxious lake of sizzling mud and shattered marble. Old Dusthowler, whistling away, already trundled down the Trenorra Road, strolling toward his next proposal.

—The Journals of Thessavia Vhex,
Mercurial Guard Captain

The apocalyptic magnitudes of wild-eyed devastation, reality-warping blasphemies, and crimes against civilization characterizing the final years of the Great Mage Wars exceeded most sane imaginations. The conventions of war, arcane or otherwise, ceased to exist while the nine magocracies "wielded" their titanic void-born against one another and the very landscape. Each nation schemed and struggled against the other, against nature, and many against the madness in their unfettered ambitions in an attempt to capture central Midgard for themselves.

Mercurial Guard reconnaissance cadre reports state Vael Turog deliberately conjured first boneshard storms at Flensing Gulch, intending to obliterate two cavalry legions, including a detachment of Mavros's Sanguine Company, maneuvering secretly from Barenna to the Coruscate Tower. Images from *fulgurate mementos* show soldiers in glyph armor lived longest, helplessly watching as splintered, wind-tossed fragments of their mangled comrades haphazardly transformed amid the whirling, foul magics into clouds of bone chips intent on finishing the deed.

These battlefronts swept across the magocracies like forces of nature; they cared little for any smaller towns and communities caught in their wake. People fled into the countryside when the war drew close but often not before burying their wealth in a basement vault, in a wall, or beneath a threshold, unwilling to deliver their treasure into the hands of an approaching army that cared little about

civilians, regardless of allegiance. Urns of coins, precious heirlooms, and beloved gifts slipped into darkness, unintentionally abandoned when the previous owner died before being able to recover their cache. For good or ill, these forgotten inheritances, strange evidences, lost knowledge, and buried mementos of this age of war and madness continue to resurface as scavengers test their luck with each expedition into the Wasted West.

COAT OF DUST AND ASH

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

Worn ragged, this cowled and belted longcoat sports chewed cuffs and tattered hems. Its perpetually dusty, mottled gray exterior still bears the runic-insignia of the reconnaissance cadre of the Mercurial Guard stitched in tarnished silver thread inside the hood.

While wearing a *coat of dust and ash*, you gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on saving throws to resist poison or disease.
- You have advantage on initiative and on Dexterity (Stealth) checks to hide, and difficult (desert or mountain) terrain doesn't cost you extra movement.

When wearing the coat within the borders of the Wasted West, you gain the following additional benefits:

- You double your proficiency bonus on Wisdom (Survival) checks made while outdoors. When not in combat, you (and those you lead) may travel between any two locations within the Wastes twice as fast as your speed would normally allow.
- The aberrant weather conditions common to the Wastes (bone, dust, and sandstorms) do not impose disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks relying on hearing or sight. You gain a +3 bonus to your passive Wisdom (Perception) and passive Intelligence (Investigation) scores while outdoors.
- ***Dust-Devil (1/long rest)***. You conjure an irradiated dust mephit companion for up to 4 hours, which behaves per *conjure minor elemental*. Alter the dust mephit statblock with the following traits: **AC** 13, **HP** 28 (8d6); ***Innate Spellcasting*** adds *burning hands* and *faerie fire* 1/day each; ***Claws*** and ***Blinding Breath*** both add the poisoned condition to their effects and DCs increase to 13.

Story Seed: ***Pearls Before***. . . A common scavenger and petty criminal, Mikhail the Stoat apparently made some "great discovery" in the Wastes. This find has drawn such attention, the group is hired to find the Stoat. War lingers on the horizon after the events in Krakova, and local powers refuse to risk a potent device being left in the hands of a half-crazed, wasteland looter. Reports of madness and murder follow in Mikhail's wake, and the rarities confiscated from past clientele have convinced important people there's value in bringing this vagabond in for questioning.

FULGURATE MEMENTO

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

The open end in this irregularly cylindrical mineral formation reveals a twisting, crystalline interior, flashing in a faint kaleidoscope of lavender energies. Deep, desert time-storm lightning strikes form these oddly shaped geodes, highly sought in the later years of the Mage Wars. Scholars and scavengers alike find them sometimes attached to decorative or personalized lanyards of silver or adamantine. This value stems from a reputation as inscrutable, powerful tools of arcane warfare, information gathering, and espionage, espoused by both field commanders and senior officers of the Mercurial Guard.

While attuned to the *fulgurate memento*, you gain the following benefits:

- You always know direction and distance to the nearest Great Walker.
- You have resistance to psychic, necrotic, and poison damage from the attacks, spells, and spell-like effects of Great Walkers and their minions.
- You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or poisoned and against illusions or mind-influencing spells and effects originating from Great Walkers and their minions.
- You can use an action to peer into the crystalline oculus of the memento, choosing one of the following effects:

  Recollect. Used as battlefield recorders and visual transmitters during the Great Mage Wars, you may utilize the *fulgurate memento* to observe events long past.

  Remind. You commit a memory of an event or a message up to 2 minutes long within the item, which can be viewed later using the Recollect power. Up to four memories may be stored in the item, and if one must be overwritten, you may choose which one.

  Revisit. You may observe the actions, movement, and immediate surroundings of any Dread Walker of which you know the name. You receive visual information only but are unrestricted in the movement, angle, or distance of your perspective within a 1,000-ft. radius of the creature.

SIBILANT GLYPH ARMOR

Wondrous item (armor), very rare (requires attunement)

This hardened, grey and black plate armor, with hammered imprints of strange symbols, lacquered eyes, and engraved mouths, feels weightless when worn, but owners say its burden is mental. Some claim it whispers when not worn.

Fashioned from an incredibly tough and lightweight substance lost to time, the armor is covered in disturbing glyphs, multi-pupiled eyes, and twisted mouths that seem sculpted from the material and shift when no one is looking. While wearing this unsettling light armor, you gain a +6 bonus to AC and the following benefits:

- The ancient and now only instinctually known origins of the armor grant you advantage on Charisma (Intimidation and Persuasion) checks while interacting dust goblins of the Wasted West.
- Your initiative rolls have advantage.
- You can consult the sibilant armor three times per long rest, asking any three detailed questions relative to Arcana, History, or Religion and regarding knowledge or past events transpiring within the Wasted West. The armor answers mentally in a burst of images. Each time you use this ability, you must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or suffer 1 random, long-term madness (save again after 1 week until successful). If used more than once in 24 hours, the DC increases to 16 and the madness intensifies.

Restless Dead

In the wake of the Battle of Flensing Gulch and the defeat of the last of Caelmarath's Indomitables by a summoned boneshard tempest, the nearly innumerable dead arose to haunt the area as boneshard wraiths, a form of undead creature only truly encountered in the Wasted West. The Bonewraith goblin tribe worships these creatures and sends their elders out to be consumed and transformed by them.

A vaguely humanoid form appears dim and hazy amid the constant swirl of

wind-wracked grit and tainted dust of the Western Wastes . . .

Contorted and broken, a ghostly horror, haphazardly assembled from mismatched bones and grave-scavenged shards, now glides in the air. Shattered eye sockets burn with the black, icy glow of eternal madness and the spiteful hunger of the void.

BONESHARD WRAITH

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 128 (15d8 +60)

Speed 15 ft., fly 60ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (−2)

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; piercing, bludgeoning or slashing from weapons that are non-magical or not silvered

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhausted, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages any languages it knew in life, Void Speech

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The boneshard wraith can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 9 force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

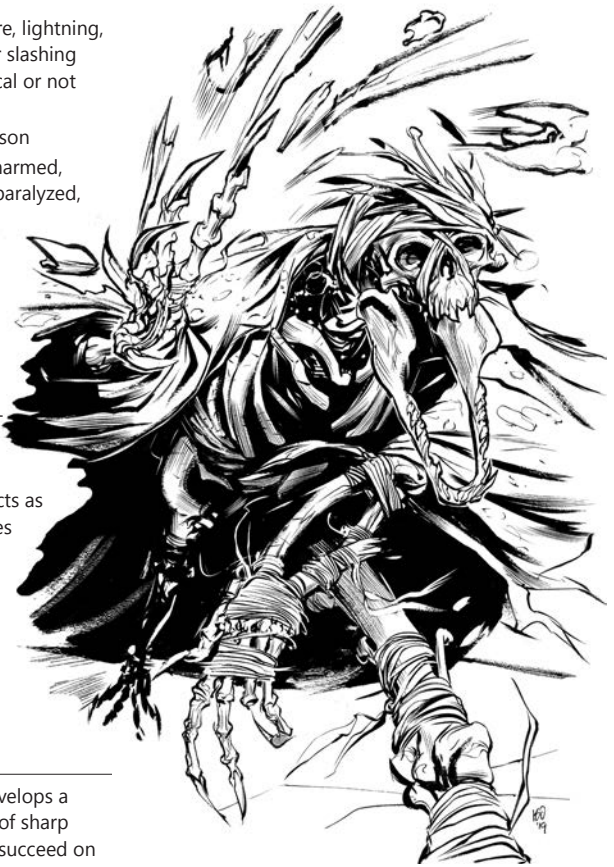
Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the wraith has disadvantage on attack rolls as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Boneshard Cyclone. The wraith envelops a target within 60 ft. in a whirlwind of sharp bone fragments. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or become deafened and blinded while taking 20 (3d12) slashing damage and 27 (6d8) necrotic at the start of each of the wraith's turns or until the save succeeds (repeated at the start of the target's turns). Any creature killed in this way rises as a boneshard wraith on the next new moon unless the remains are *blessed*. Only 1 Boneshard Cyclone may be active per wraith.

Spectral Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) slashing damage and target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion (maximum 2 levels/ target /rest).

Multiattack. The wraith makes two Spectral Claw attacks. If both attacks damage the same target creature, the target becomes paralyzed for 1 minute (DC 15 Constitution saving throw each round to remove condition)



Dread Spawn of the Wasted West

by Kelly Pawlik

The Wasted West is host to myriad dangers, from the tribes of dust goblins to vicious sentient plants to the ravening undead that seem to be everywhere. Best known of this region's hazards, however, are the Dread Walkers, the alien Great Old Ones summoned in the final days of the Great Mage Wars by wizards unaware of the ruin their hubris would bring. The Walkers sleepwalk now, time-trapped for the time being, largely unable to affect Midgard directly, but their legacy remains, and some of them have spawned new horrors upon the Mortal Realm.

The dread spawn presented here are just a few examples of the enduring ruin the Dread Walkers have wrought upon Midgard. These creatures are not all malicious, and they are rarely clever, but like their progenitors, their existence is an affront to nature itself, and they must be expunged by any stout-hearted person who values freedom and sanity.

Grimmlet

A jagged shard of smoky translucent crystal, approximately the size and mass of a housecat, hovers before you. Despite its seeming lack of interest in anything that lies around it, something about the creature's non-symmetrical appearance feels offensive to the natural order.

Born of the Void. Grimmlets arrive in the Mortal Realm from the same portion of the Far Reaches that spawned the Waste Walker Kb'r'ck of Crystal. Grimmlets were named in honor of the unfortunate tracker who discovered them, Aleksei Grimmczyk, who did not survive this initial meeting but whose demise was recounted by his friend, the elfmarked mage Alethrie

Strange Families. A grimmlet's method of reproduction, creating near clones of itself when injured by arcane energy, can cause them to quickly gather in large familial swarms. Strangely, a grimmlet can only swarm with other grimmlets created from the same progenitor grimmlet and with the progenitor itself, and after about an hour, these swarms disperse and move away from each other to create new swarms through magic injury.

Whispering Menace. Grimmlets do not speak. In fact, they never communicate with other creatures via any known form of language or telepathy. The air around a grimmlet, however, mutters and whispers at all times in a foul-sounding invocation. When the creature uses its innate magic, these whispers rise in volume slightly, giving canny listeners a split-second warning that something, likely unpleasant, is about to occur.

GRIMMLET

Tiny monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 52 (15d4 + 15)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	3 (−4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

Damage Immunities psychic

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons.

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Senses blindsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The grimmlet's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *maddening whispers**

At will: *crushing curse*, minor illusion*

Reproduce. If the grimmlet is dealt damage by a spell that does not reduce it to 0 hit points, a number of new grimmlets equal to the level of the spell slot used to cast the spell are created in the nearest empty spaces to the injured grimmlet. If the grimmlet is injured by a spell cast using innate spellcasting, the number of new grimmlets created is equal to the level of the spell cast. Grimmlets injured by cantrips or at-will innate spells create one new grimmlet.

Sixteen or more grimmlets within 30 feet of each other become a **grimmlet swarm**.

ACTIONS

Crystal Edge. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage and an additional 1 psychic damage.

REACTIONS

Self Destruct. When the grimmlet is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes in a spray of void-infused crystal shards that deals 3 (1d6) slashing damage and 3 (1d6) psychic damage to all creatures within 5 feet of it. Creatures that make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw avoid taking the slashing damage.

GRIMMLET SWARM

Flowing over the landscape like a glass carpet, this mass of smoky crystalline shards moves in a manner most unnatural. Occasionally, a bolt of black or purple energy arcs between two or more of the shards in the swarm.

GRIMMLET SWARM

Large swarm of Tiny monstrosities, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 199 (21d10 + 84)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	3 (−4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)

Damage Immunities psychic

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons.

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Senses blindsense 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

GRIMMLETS AND KB'R'CK OF CRYSTAL

It is unknown by mortals if grimmlets have any relationship at all to Kb'r'ck, or if they communicate with the Walker in any fashion. In truth, all grimmlets are a type of sensor that project everything they experience back to their crystalline progenitor. What the inscrutable Kb'r'ck does with the information being transmitted while it is time-trapped is impossible to know.

Innate Spellcasting. The grimmlet swarm's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

1/day each: *hallucinatory terrain*

3/day each: *hypnotic pattern, major image, void strike**

At will: *crushing curse (as 11th-level cantrip)*, maddening whispers*, minor illusion*

Reproduce. If the grimmlet swarm is dealt damage by a spell that does not reduce it to 0 hit points, a number of new grimmlets equal to the level of the spell slot used to cast the spell are created in the nearest empty spaces to the injured grimmlet swarm. If the grimmlet swarm is injured by a spell cast using innate spellcasting, the number of new grimmlets created is equal to the level of the spell cast. Grimmlet swarms injured by cantrips or at-will innate spells create one new grimmlet.

New grimmlets created by the grimmlet swarm are not subsumed into the swarm. They instead form a new swarm once sixteen or more new grimmlets have been created.

Maze of Edges. A creature that attempts to move out of or through the grimmlet swarm must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 19 (3d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Shroud of Whispers. As a bonus action, the grimmlet swarm can cast crushing curse* or maddening whispers* on all creatures that share its space.

Swarm. The grimmlet swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a single grimmlet. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The grimmlet swarm makes three attacks with its crystal edges.

Crystal Edges. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d10 + 3) slashing damage and 20 (3d10 + 4) psychic damage.

REACTIONS

Enervating Maelstrom. When the grimmlet swarm is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes in a plume of ennui that deals 42 (12d6) psychic damage and 1d3 levels of exhaustion to all creatures within 20 feet of it. Creatures that make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw take only half of the psychic damage and one level of exhaustion.

*See also *Deep Magic: Void Magic*.

Orniraptor

A clumsy-looking flightless bird with a short conical beak, no feathers or skin stares blankly with its single eye. Its organs are held in place by a slimy transparent membrane.

Nearly Mindless. Orniraptors are creatures of pure instinct and share many traits in common with the basest vermin rather than beasts. They attack anything that moves and attempt to peck off pieces small enough to fit into their too-small beaks.

Troublesome Pests. Unlike some of the other dread spawn, orniraptors tend to be more troublesome than dangerous due to their persistence in striking at anything that moves. They can become deadly, however, if a large number of them start moving in the same direction.

Quiet Yet Loud. Orniraptors have no vocal organs and simply squawk soundlessly as they move about. Their movements tend to be jerky and clumsy however, so the creatures tend to be quite audible as they move about.

ORNIRAPTOR

Small monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 33 (6d6 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	2 (−4)	7 (−2)	8 (−1)

Senses passive Perception 8

Language —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Collective Perception. An orniraptor is aware of everything for which every other orniraptor within 20 feet of it is aware of.

Poor Vision. An orniraptor's visual acuity is based on movement, so creatures that don't move or act on their turn are invisible to them. Their collective perception can negate this penalty.

ACTIONS

Peck. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Spit Stone. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

REACTIONS

Blood Spurt. A creature that deals piercing or slashing damage to an orniraptor must make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) points of acid damage as it is struck by the creature's caustic blood.

Parzz'val

Six legs, ending in massive, three-fingered humanoid hands, support a headless horse-like torso. The front of this creature's mass opens into a huge tripartite maw filled with jagged, web-shrouded ridges, dripping a caustic substance.

Failed Experiments. Parzz'vals are created by the treacherous wizard enkada pishtuhk in his efforts to recreate a version

ORNIRAPTORS AND ORNIS AMMOS, THE SAND BIRD

Orniraptors were initially created by accident by sand goblin tribes living near Ornis Ammos. The goblins allowed their food birds to eat from and around the sleepwalking titan, causing them to grow in size and stature into their new forms. Some sand goblin tribes now tend to the creatures as they can breed true, hatching new orniraptors as a result of their mating. Ornis Ammos seems to be completely unaware of the existence of orniraptors, and it remains to be seen what role the Dread Walker takes with them if and when he awakes.

of pah'draguusthlai the devourer in a form beholden to and controlled by him. Thus far, his attempts have failed. No matter what form or features his creations take at their birth, they twist into a parzz'val over the course of a week or less. To date, enkada has been unable to even create a form of parzz'val controllable by his magic and has sent each of these failed creations out into the wasted west to wreak havoc.

Bottomless Hunger. A parzz'val has enough intelligence to reason and problem-solve, but they are largely guided by their monstrous appetites. Witnesses to the aftermath of a parzz'val attack claim to have seen one of the gluttonous creatures consume two horses and at least a dozen adult men in the space of an hour. Parzz'vals prefer live prey but are not above eating carrion if their preferred meal isn't available.

Ambush Hunters. Despite, or perhaps because of, their enormous hunger, parzz'vals are excellent at taking their prey by surprise. Coloration between parzz'vals varies slightly, but they trend toward sandy browns and stony greys. A parzz'val can wait patiently for hours for the ideal time to strike if they anticipate a meal awaits as a reward.

PARZZ'VAL

Large aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 178 (17d10 + 85)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	7 (−2)

Saving Throws Con +7
Skills Stealth +6
Damage Vulnerabilities thundering
Damage Immunities acid; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons.
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, unconscious
Senses blindsense 120 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Void Speech
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Caustic Web (Recharge 5–6). As a bonus action, the parzz'val can carpet a 10-foot square with sticky, acidic webbing to a height of 3 feet. The webbing is considered difficult terrain. A creature standing in the webbing at the start of its turn takes 18 (4d8) acid damage or half that if it succeeds at a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. The webs persist for 1 minute before collapsing. The parzz'val's movement is unaffected by the webs it or other parzz'vals create.

Pummel. If the parzz'val deals damage to a creature with four melee attacks in one round, it has advantage on all melee attacks it makes against that creature in the next round.

Regeneration. The parzz'val regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the parzz'val takes thundering damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of its next turn. The parzz'val only dies if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and does not regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The parzz'val makes four oversized fist attacks.

Oversized Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Oversized Maw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d12 + 5) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Swallow Whole. If the parzz'val deals damage to a Medium or smaller creature with its oversized maw attack, the creature must

PARZZ'VAL AND PAH'DRAGUUSTHLAI THE DEVOURER

Parzz'vals have no relationship to Pah'draguusthlai, whose flesh and blood they are created from. They do have a relationship of sorts with their creator, Enkada Pishtuhk, who they avoid at all costs.

succeed on a DC 16 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or be swallowed by the parzz'val.

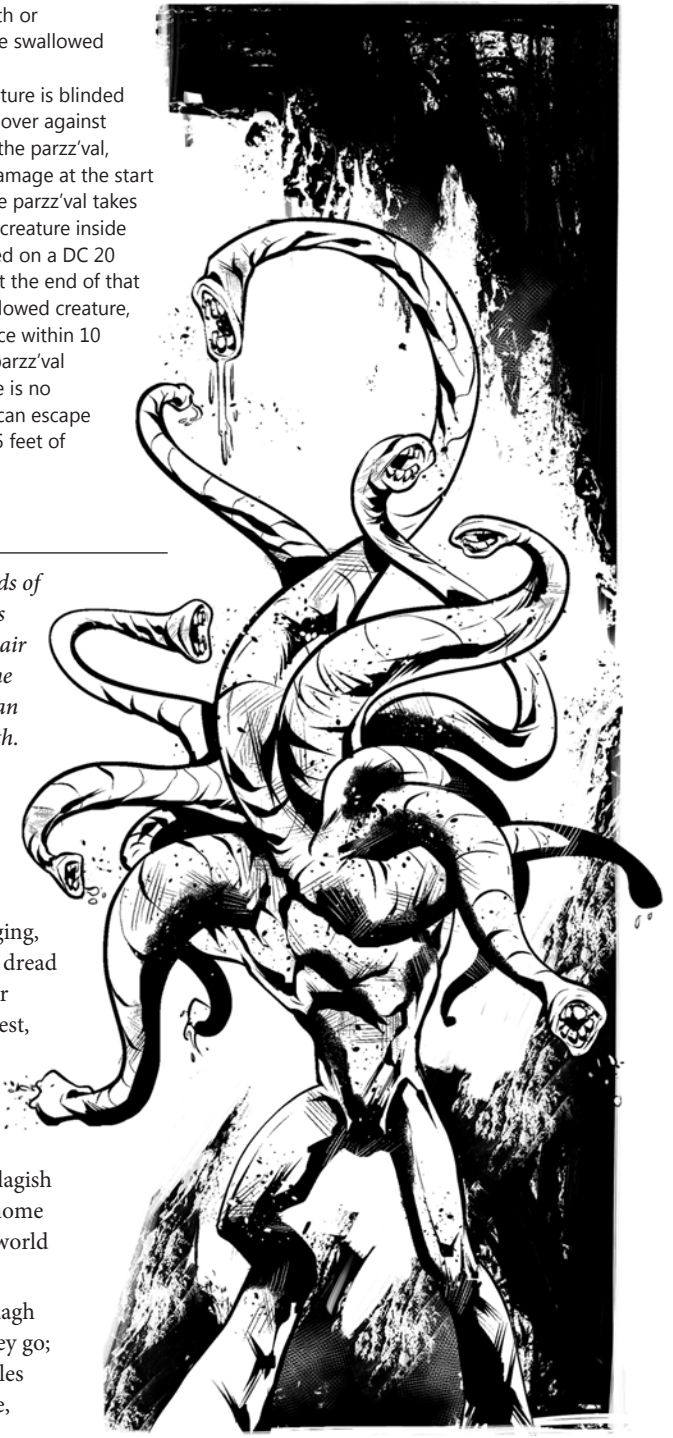
While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and effects outside the parzz'val, and it takes 36 (8d8) acid damage at the start of the parzz'val's turns. If the parzz'val takes 30 damage or more from a creature inside it, the parzz'val must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate the swallowed creature, which falls prone into a space within 10 feet of the parzz'val. If the parzz'val dies, the swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 15 feet of movement, falling prone.

Vangsluagh

A writhing mass of hundreds of rubbery, blue-grey tentacles rises from a human-sized pair of legs ending in elephantine feet. Each tentacle ends in an eerily human looking mouth.

Apocalypse Children. Creatures maddened in the shadow of Uthul-Vangslagish eventually transform into vangsluagh, the doom-singing, wandering heralds of their dread parent. Vangsluagh wander the lands of the Wasted West, spreading discord whenever they come into contact with mortals. Some sages contend that Uthul-Vangslagish will call all of its children home when it is time to end the world with its song.

Damned Pipers. Vangsluagh create a din everywhere they go; the mouths on their tentacles perpetually scream, whistle,



bleat, growl, and cry. Even in instances where a vangsluagh may want a quiet entrance or stealthy ambush, their own bodies betray them. Stories have emerged from the wastes, however, of vangsluagh that are capable of silencing the noise surrounding them.

Defilers of Beauty. Vangsluagh despise pretty things, be they creature, object, or structure. Given the opportunity, a vangsluagh prefers spending its time smashing beautiful things to bits. The absence of beauty doesn't necessarily calm these creatures however; they target living creatures as a priority in these occurrences.

VANGSLUAGH

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities thundering
Condition Immunities deafened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Void Speech
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cacophony. The vangsluagh constantly emits a din of bleats, trills, and trumpets. A creature that casts a spell while it is within 30 feet of the vangsluagh must make a DC 13 Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw. (The type of saving throw required is dependent on the spellcasting creature's spellcasting ability score.) On a failed save, the spell is not cast, and the spell slot used is not expended. Additionally, a creature within 30 feet of the vangsluagh that is maintaining concentration on a spell must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. Failing the saving throw prevents the creature from maintaining concentration.

Constant Racket. The vangsluagh has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vangsluagh makes two tentacle lash attacks.

Tentacle Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Sonic Bullet. Ranged Magic Attack: +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (4d6 + 3) thundering damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be deafened until the beginning of the vangsluagh's next turn.

Agonizing Trill (Recharge After a Short or Long Rest). The vangsluagh increases the pitch of its cacophony to deadly levels. All creatures within 30 feet of the vangsluagh take 35 (10d6) points of thundering damage and are stunned for 1 minute. A creature that makes a DC 13 Constitution saving throw halves the amount of thundering damage it takes and negates the stunned condition. A stunned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns and negates the condition on a success.

VANGSLUAGH AND UTHUL-VANGSLAGISH, THE SHRIEKING MOUNTAIN

Vangsluagh are created from their parent, Uthul-Vangslagish, in some inscrutable and horrid biological fashion. These creatures feel something for their parent, and despite their alignment, vangsluagh can be found in the shadow of the Dread Walker, violently protecting it from creatures that would approach it.

Bemmea's Scheming Arcanists

by Troy E. Taylor

I've watched Gispara Ravensbark cast spells on several occasions, and I've never ceased to be amazed. The ancient gnome is almost nonchalant as she assumes a well-practiced stance, platinum ankh gently cradled in her left hand, her arm swinging loosely at her side.

There's a devilish twinkle in her eyes as she begins the incantation. The fingers of her free hand are a blur of motion, precision befitting a maestro. Then comes the somatic component: her utterances of ancient Elvish violating more than a hundred magocratic ordinances.

But as with all spellcasting in Bemmea, mastery of the art is its own loophole.

—Hortensia Athon

Most archmages contemplate the machinations of old rivals and take elaborate measures as a precaution against them. Wizards of the middle ranks contend with peers whose meddling undermines ambition's aims.

Even as they keenly watch for rivals' schemes, most arcanists are laying out their own plans. Like puppeteers who never reveal how they string a marionette, the real satisfaction comes from how one masks the connecting lines, maintaining the illusion that an adversary is dancing of their own accord.

Bemmea is a cauldron of intrigue. It is a city of secrets and secret societies, of fraternities and guilds, of institutions of learning, and of apprenticeships with their own allegiances and vows.

There are plots and plotters aplenty.

Here then is a listing of some of the capital city's most masterful mages, who are as often the pawns as they are the architects of some grand design.

Gelasien Kuskoom

Gelasien loves a room with a view. She's not powerful enough to yet obtain a living space in the famed Kallimachus Spire, but she does have an apartment in the spire's adjoining northwest support tower, connected by a skybridge.

The apartment is stylish and fashionable. Gelasien patronizes the arts. Even if Bemmea's offerings pale in comparison to the high realism of the Seven Cities' masters in sculpture and painting, they do reflect the city's fascination with the fantastic: abstract

representations of the elements make for a stunning mural.

If Gelasien continues to hone her skill, the Barsella-born illusionist might even attain a spot in the city's most illustrious property, the ocean-front High Spires. Oh, to dream.

For someone who defines success by elevation, her ascended path is grounded in the trenches. By proxy and by favor, she has the allegiance of more than a dozen Feywarden officers. Many who patrol the Arbonesse border around Tintager depend on her patronage, which in the currency of Allain, compounding the influence she commands in Bemmea.

Gelasien's "interest" in the Feywardens has not gone unnoticed. Malcot Ebonstaff and Feywarden Cothwidden have both called on her to assess her motivations and intentions. Both left her presence convinced the auburn-haired woman with a dusky complexion was a true patriot of Allain. They came warded against her enchantments, but they saw what she wished them to see.

She knows she may have to demonstrate her "patriotism" soon. Mages more powerful than that pair will be watching her carefully. Sometimes, the most powerful illusion is to undertake an action without magic.

Friends and Rivals: As a patron of the arts, Gelasien is enraptured with Imalian Jaskvitze's style of storytelling. Imalian is not privy to Gelasien's true designs on power, which is just as well for both, given their predilections. Gelasien has already picked a target to prove her trustworthiness. Prentervuul Ulst entrusted her with knowledge of his illicit activities. But she is willing to betray him.

Signature Spells: *dark dementing* (MHH), *hallucinatory terrain, hypnotic pattern*.

Glerung Ulberhast

Broad-shouldered and dressed in woodland greens, Glerung Ulberhast looks more like a forester than a conjurer. From the earliest age, he was taught to appreciate growing things, especially old trees with thick, course bark. Like him, they endure.

Glerung frequently takes contemplative walks among the cluster of trees in the small park that contains the Nefarious Fountain. Despite the park's size, it most closely resembles the sheltering boughs of his birthplace, the Old Margreve hamlet of Whistlehallow Village.

Unlike his Margreve kinfolk, Glerung no longer abides superstition. To him, magic is a formula as definitive as mathematics. As enchanting as old wives' tales and folk wisdom may sound, they can never be taken at face value. The hokum must be peeled away to get at the concrete truth beneath.

That is why Glerung has no romantic notions about elvish magic. It is a commodity to be acquired and used; no more dangerous than any other brand of magic. Of course, so long as the magocracy's authorities continue to use propaganda and laws to discourage (and in many cases, outright ban) the use or possession of anything elvish in origin, the appetite for it grows more ravenous.

Glerung feeds that appetite. He provides that which is forbidden, a lucrative and dangerous occupation. When he gets wind of an item "in the open" (as he describes elvish artifacts on the cusp of discovery), he assembles teams of adventurers to make forays across the border.

Glerung always sends two teams. The first is of trusted confidantes, mostly rogues, druids, and rangers who have more loyalty to a freshly minted coin than to the nine-star banner of Allain. This first team is fully aware Glerung will have other agents on the case.

The second is through an assumed identity, an approach that produces interesting results. Glerung poses as Adrastes Fochetto, the ascended chamberlain of the ninth level of the Order of the Sunrise Shadow. The society, which has a charter to study ley lines, is headquartered just west of the White Citadel. Robed in white with a brilliant gold stole, Fochetto cuts an imposing authoritative figure. Relying on the society's veil of secrecy, he assembles parties of inexperienced adventurers.

Friends and Rivals: As Fochetto, he depends on the tiefling wizard Lol'usoth Tashuz for information on potential buyers. The bard Imalian Jaskvitze is a constant thorn in Glerung's side; she has tried to horn in on many deals, always waiting until an artifact has been brought into the city before bringing the pressure of blackmail to get a cut.

Signature Spells: *black tentacles, shadow realm gateway* (MHH), *stinking cloud*.

Imalian Jaskvitze

Imalian is a female human bard whose grandfather was a troubadour back in old Illyria. She has the same fine features as him, an alluring beauty shared by many folks born of the Winewood.

Her father, who had the same vagabond yearnings, was content to stay on the move. The family lived in a mule-drawn wagon that made a circuit of the Seven Cities. They performed in coaching inns along the way, were street-corner musicians in the larger cities, and played supporting roles for established theater companies. Only later did the Seven Cities' war with the Mharoti Empire force them from their homeland.

Her mother insisted they settle down, preferably in a place where their daughter might yet receive proper instruction as a spellcaster. They put their trust in their team's lead mule, Adagio, who guided them on a seemingly impossible trek. They braved rickety paths through the Pytonne Mountains and navigated the dangers of the Mage Road until at last Adagio clop-clopped into Bemmea.

The family opened a shop in the city's northeast quadrant that made and repaired musical instruments. Imalian was enrolled in the Academies Arcana.

Imalian performed in all of the city's finest inns and taverns. But the stage she considers her own is the Toppled Tower in the northwest quadrant. To her, there isn't a better spot. The open archways of the building's arcade serve as an amazing backdrop to her performance, the lightning blue of the Outermost Sea visible beyond. (Plus, local lore claims that the ley line called Leviathan's Road passes through the tavern; always a plus should push ever come to shove in a magical showdown.)

It took a long time for the family to gain acceptance. Imalian endured taunts, jeers, and accusations because of her elvish-sounding name and delicate appearance. The family eventually won over their neighbors with good cheer and delightful music.

Imalian hasn't always used a smile and a jest to see her way through. Magical charms and social leverage are in her repertoire; she gets what she wants with influence peddling and by playing off others' desires. She has yet to penetrate the tight social circle of Allain's most powerful mages, but she's angled closer and closer with every gambit.

Friends and Rivals: She was delighted when the illusionist Gelasien Kuskoom became her patron and her friend (without resorting to charms to be enamored of her). Her enchantments haven't endeared her to everyone. The calculating Glerung Ulberhast finds the practice distasteful, and he thinks many of her accolades are unwarranted. She thinks that Glerung is hiding many secrets.

Signature Spells: *compulsion, dominate person, fear*.

Lol'usoth Tashuz

Lol'usoth Tashuz desires revenge. The despair in the tiefling's heart is unquenchable, not unlike the arcane flames that ravage Bemmea's Smoldering Library.

Some say Lol'usoth is a sentimental fool. In Bemmea, where pursuit of magical mysteries is a paramount concern, one must learn to get beyond such losses. When the deceased is a spellcaster, one must prepare for such an outcome: eldritch manipulation is inherently dangerous.

In Lol'usoth's case, it was almost a foregone conclusion. Lol'usoth loved the demonmarked evoker Kasidra Entripee, a sorceress who loosed fire from her fingertips and whose eyes smoldered with passion for the next great adventure. She was a matchstick destined to burn out quickly.

There was naught but a pile of ash to say farewell to, no possessions left as keepsakes. Lol'usoth's plight is understandable; he has only memories of intimacy left to mourn.

A master evoker in his own right, Lol'usoth has dedicated himself to bringing Kasidra's killers to justice. He's traced his beloved's final steps from the Elves in Irons tavern to the Skull Bowl. He's questioned masters in the Academies Arcana to the point of rudeness. He's called on favors from the Guild of Honest Inkers and Sanctioned Sigilists. But the clues always circle back, the killers' tracks covered too cleverly, leaving him in a spiral of despair.

Desperate, he has begun reaching out to adventurers to help him find the truth. The real culprit had best pray for redemption because Lol'usoth's wrath will be unleashed in a torrent of elemental magic.

Friends and Rivals: Glerung Ulberhast relies on Lol'usoth's unerring desire for the truth to provide reliable information, an arrangement that has been mutually beneficial. The scribe Prentervuul Ulst has been a most steadfast friend, encouraging

the tiefling's investigation even when others say it is hopeless. Prentervuul, though, has played Lol'usoth for false. Kasidra's singular thirst for adventure was too great an inner fire for a necromancer of Prentervuul's abilities to ignore. He arranged for her death. Then armed with a cold iron mask of demonic origin and incantations once cast by the lord of shadows and the goddess of the underworld, Prentervuul trapped Kasidra's soul and forged her into his own mask wight (see *Tome of Beasts*). Hidden in a vault beneath the Librarium Caelmarath, Kasidra is now an undead knight who will serve Prentervuul's bidding when his own plans come to fruition.

Signature Spells: *doom of the earthen maw* (MWB), *flameweave* (MHH), *wall of force, winter's radiance* (MHH).

Mulith Ashagol

For years, adventure took Mulith to ports around the Middle Sea. She served captains both honest and pirate. Dark haired, bright eyed, and with a complexion kissed by the sun, Mulith was seeking her destiny.

She found it on a journey up the River Nurai, just as her inner magic became manifest. A sorceress, she sought guidance at a temple devoted to Thoth-Hermes. After years of study, likeminded custodians initiated her into a secret society, the Emerald Order.

The order's leader, Dromdel Re, personally gave her a new task. Embedding her into a trade mission to Allain, she was instructed to steer society according to the tenets of the Emerald Tablet. Citing her personal devotion to Thoth-Hermes, Mulith was accorded honored accommodations within the silvered spire of Bemmea's Feathered Tower.

Mulith must navigate between twin obligations: keeping secret her affiliation to the Emerald Order while serving the trade interests of the River Kingdom's ruler, King Thutmoses XXIII. While the two interests rarely are in conflict, she must never risk exposure as belonging to the order without risking her appointment (and probably her life).

Mulith has an affinity for swashbucklers and sorcerers, so she prefers to recruit them for clandestine missions.

Friends and Rivals: Though their goals are often opposed, Mulith has come to respect and admire the straightforward methods of the conjurer Pandarus Kildare. Their encounters have been cordial even while they work to undermine each other's efforts. The necromancer Prentervuul Ulst is a more pressing concern; the Order believes he is meddling with powers beyond his ken.

Signature Spells: *banishment, flame strike, guardian of faith*.

Prentervuul Ulst

The shingle over Prentervuul's modest storefront shop reads, "Sage: Research 10 sp per Candle." The unassuming human native of Allain supplements his business by scribing for the Guild of Honest Inkers and Sanctioned Sigilists.

Prentervuul is known as a diligent researcher whose asking rate is far less than his true value. He has little free time, but there are a handful of mages in Bemmea who call him friend, who invite him into their homes and share meals.

In dark corners of the Red Door Market and the Librarium Caelmarath, however, there are rumors about the mage exchanged only as whispers. Certain servants of the Shroud Guildhouse know him by their dealings both illicit and forbidden. He is supplied with the instruments and chemicals reserved for the embalmer's craft. Necromancy is a forbidden art in the magocracy, but he thinks himself too clever to be caught.

Accusations of his involvement in the vile art surfaced in the past. But Prentervuul's reputation was vigorously defended with testimonials by guild scribes in good standing. Now, whenever a new crop of rumors surface, he dismisses them as old news already refuted, and the guild threatens the accuser with libel.

In fact, he is more nefarious than any suspect. The only thing that has held him back is a genuine apprenticeship. He is forging his own way in discovering the path to controlling the undead. His boldness has rewarded him with accomplishments that should be beyond his skill level. There have also been missteps that proper instruction would have helped him avoid.

He has designs on the Ninemage Council; perhaps even ruling himself. He hides his undead creations in secret places across the city. When the time is right, he will unleash them.

Friends and Rivals: Any friendship he makes is a pretense, a means to gain access to something or someone that will advance his necromancy. The most gullible of his acquaintances is the tiefling Lol'usoth Tashuz. More than a few wise mages, including Pandarus Kildare, Mulith Ashagol, and Gelasien Kuskoom suspect him of necromancy but lack the evidence needed to act against him directly.

Signature Spells: *animate dead, bestow curse, blight, circle of death.*

The Lever, the Fulcrum, and the Screw

Three archmages who became disenchanted with how magic was being taught at the Academies Arcana made repeated attempts at reform over the years. Gispara Ravensbark, a female gnome now ranked as an archmage, and Pandarus Kildare, a male human conjurer of nearly equal status, have devoted a lifetime to developing new methods of instruction. Lufra Sly, a female human summoner, was part of the early effort but has since moved on. They met mostly headwinds despite earning accolades for their effort.

Decades ago, Gispara and Pandarus met in a chance meeting at the Grifyn and the Kimera. The latter lent a sympathetic ear to the gnome's theories. The pair shared an aptitude for conjuration magic (and a thirst for the tavern's signature label).

Because they explored the application of force in spells outside the evocation school as a primary tenet, intrigued onlookers took to calling the pair the Fulcrum and the Lever. Gispara was the "fulcrum," positing every new point. Pandarus, possessed of an analytical mind and willing to test every assertion, thus earned the name, the "lever."

The partnership drew the interest of a third: Sly, a wizard originally from the Republic of Valera. Sly earned her reputation as an iconoclast, having already been ejected from the Lodge of Three Moons after a dispute escalated, and she cast *void strike* against the grandmaster.

Gispara and Pandarus were interested in how their method could "push" or propel magic. But Sly, as a summoner, sought ways it could "pull." By helping them formalize this overlooked aspect, Sly was given the nickname, the Screw.

Friends and Rivals: The partnership dissolved as their respective lives took them different directions. Over the years, they sometimes came into conflict. Pandarus used the method in service of the magocracy. Sly became a pariah, using her magic to open the curtain between realities. Gispara sought a middle path and tried to master access to the shadow roads.

Signature Spells: Pandarus: *blizzard* (MHH), *caustic torrent* (MHH), and *ley surge* (MHH); Sly: *glimpse of the void* (MWB), *last stars of the dying sun* (MHH), and *void rift* (MWB); Gispara: *greater ley pulse* (MHH), *open red portal* (MWB), and *seal red portal* (MWB).

Abbreviations: MWB, *Midgard Worldbook*; MHH, Midgard Heroes Handbook

GISPARA'S REFORMS

Gispara's longtime critic Hortensia Athon, a mage of the Affiliation of Unaffiliated Wizards, is one of the most outspoken critics of Gispara's reforms.

And to be clear, Athon finds fault with the approach itself. Of Gispara, she has only admiration.

Athon acknowledges that Gispara's application of evocation magic can "put more rum in the punch bowl."

But, she says, the result of such an approach is to cast spells that are brittle and prone to shatter. "They are swinging pots and pans of cast iron when they could be wielding a hammer or mace made of wrought iron," Athon says. "Both pack a wallop when they hit home, but eventually, that frying pan will crack and split in two."

Gispara declined many opportunities to explain her method before an assembly of the Affiliation of Unaffiliated Wizards.

Because their debate has been polite and without malice, the pair has for nearly a decade privately exchanged gifts for New Year's Dawn. Athon always gives Gispara a kitchen utensil made of cast iron. In return, Gispara gives Athon a box of nails.

Gispara has been overheard wryly observing that, as she is not a carpenter but still does some of her own cooking, "I'm getting the better end of the deal."

TINTAGER'S MOUNTED MAGES

by Troy E. Taylor

The perceived threat of fey invasion has long concerned Allain. For those residing within the Iron Metropolis of Tintager, the concern is obsessive.

Prominent among the city's Feywarden defenders are war mages who belong to cavalry-focused martial orders. The mounted war mages inspire awe: not only do they charge across the battlefield in a thundering of hooves, they have destructive magic at their command.

Rivalries between the orders are legendary. But when there is a call to defend Allain, petty disputes are set aside.

Part 1: Generalities About the Orders

Members of the orders devote themselves to prowess in the saddle and to study of the arcane. These spellcasting knights live austere lives—something akin to monasticism. No vow binds them to chastity or poverty, but common cause, hard work, and their devotion to the homeland is enough for most to adopt such trappings.

Race and gender are generally no barrier to recruitment with elves being an obvious exception.

Theirs is not a solitary existence. Members share a strong fraternal bond. They encourage one another to be steadfast and true, aid in each other's training and development, and celebrate demonstrations of valor.

The Ninemage Council allows the orders to govern themselves and operate with a semblance of independence. But the council places a singular check on their activities: each order must maintain a fortification along the boundary with the Arbonesse.

The council believes the forts are a deterrent against elvish invasion. Decades without an incursion has reinforced that belief.

The unstated reason, however, is to keep the orders from acquiring too much wealth or political influence. The construction, staffing, and upkeep of these castles require considerable sums. Coin that can't be spent currying favor and influence. Each castle also serves as a headquarters, keeping the leaders occupied and away from the capital politics.

Having to defend fixed positions runs contrary to the basic strategy of mounted units using their mobility and spells to control areas on the battlefield. Those tasked with formulating military strategy for the orders are fully aware of conundrum. It is understood by all that the fortifications would be expendable in an invasion.

Part 2: Existing Orders of Mounted Feywardens

Here are some of the mounted orders of war mages in Tintager.

BOOKBINDERS

The Bookbinders formed when women and men of Tintager's bookbinding guild took up arms when ordinary citizenry were mustered for the common defense.

Many who answered the call could cast spells, even if their aptitude was limited to cantrips. A large segment of this guild remained in armed service after the emergency ended.

At first, the Bookbinders tried to find a place among existing orders. But they met resistance wherever they applied.

Unwanted, the members forged their own order and assumed the responsibility of serving as long-range scouts. But even taking up this task seemed to irritate many of the other Feywardens. The mages of Tintager didn't want to admit that their diviners couldn't provide military intelligence. They thought the Bookbinder scouts were superfluous.

The Bookbinders won over the doubters. There were instances when Tintager scrying could not pierce the veil of elf glamour. Bookbinder patrols filled the gap, providing news of enemy movements when diviners in high towers could not. In skirmishes, the Bookbinders made strategic assessments about terrain and enemy force configurations and then conveyed that information with a martial context that was unmatched.

The Bookbinders are presently without two of its top leaders. The human grand master, Mika "Ol' Stitcher" Sardanels, died during the winter. The human seneschal, Kendra Sveldendauttir, feels she was too old to assume the mantle and has resigned, so the order can appoint two younger leaders.

CASSILON BRIGADE

The Cassilon Brigade claims to be an ancient order. Stretching back to a misty past, the order traces its origins to monks from the Sun Kingdom of Cassilon. For reasons not completely understood, these monks served in old Caelmarath, the kingdom along the Arbonesse border that predated the magocracies.

Historians are admittedly confused about the brigade's allegiances, noting that Cassilon and Andarre were allied against Caelmarath during the Great Mage Wars.

Rigorous students of history have suggested that the Cassilon Brigade was not an order of mage knights as it now purports. Rather, it was a mercenary company that lost a sultan's protection in the Sun Kingdom. Unwelcome, the band became sellswords to rival magocracies.

During the Great Mage Wars, the Cassilon Brigade fractured into a number of martial groups and honorific societies, some of which did not even have military responsibilities. For a time, remnant chapters in Carnessa, Uxloon, and Cassilon all considered themselves heirs to the original brigade. Only the chapter in Allain survived. Even so, the Allain chapter did not resemble the current brigade. Barely a handful of spellcasters served at one time. It was clearly an infantry unit that fought mostly in skirmishes and on the sidelines of great battles.

Yet perhaps because of that, the Allain chapter avoided being wiped out. Over time, the Cassilon Brigade embraced some of its heritage, adding rituals and trappings to its deeds and horsemanship to its repertoire.

Today, the Cassilon Brigade always looks the part of an elite cavalry unit: its commanders wear plumed helmets, sit tall in saddles adorned with jewels, and standard bearers proudly wave the nine-star pennant of Allain. Nearly half of its members are spellcasters. It is supported by

an elite corps of minotaur infantry.

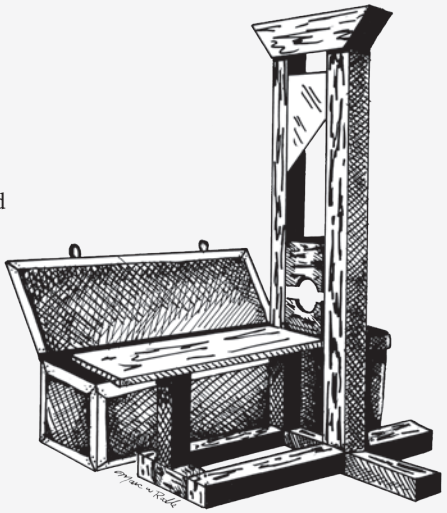
Thaumaturgist-Chevalier Hadriana Dioclenatus is the order's grand master. She is a woman of imperious bearing who boasts of her troops' invincibility. She is outwardly human but is believed to have more than a portion of demonmarked heritage. It is no secret she was adopted into the household of Allain warlock Fabricia Dioclenatus. Hadriana has long been rumored to be an illegitimate child from the household of Erramun the Sleepless, the much respected tiefling wizard-cleric of Hecate.

COLD IRON DEFENDERS

Seen on the field of battle, the line of Cold Iron Defenders is unmistakable. War mages in gray tabards emblazoned with a crimson star sit astride mounts with roan coats. Their lances are tipped in cold iron and adorned with pennants of that same gray and crimson.

When the Long Steel Line charges, observers say it cuts through the enemy

THE KEYHOLDERS OF HECATE



About 300 years ago, the most prominent military order was the Keyholders of Hecate. The Keyholders were famed for courage and tenacity, fighting even when outnumbered three-to-one. The order had an exemplary record of chivalry.

The Keyholders were originally lancers tasked with escorting spellcasters as conditions deteriorated in the western lands. After admitting spellcasters, the order expanded to securing trade between the cities of the magocracies. The order, acting fully as a mage-protection service tied to trade, effectively became a bank. It acquired riches—and influence—rapidly.

Two personalities then came into conflict: the Bemmean architect of the magocracy, Exarch Vermes II, and grand mistress of the Keyholders, Chassiopeia Pyrah. The dispute crystalized once Pyrah demanded seats on the council for both herself and the order's seneschal, Varanar Thane.

At the time, the Keyholders seemed unassailable. The order's riders had a reputation for personal integrity. Compared with Vermes's "less virtuous" approach to governance, there was a sharp contrast.

Vermes did not tolerate the Keyholders' demands. A group of demonmarked warriors and casters personally loyal to the exarch raided the Keyholders' compound. They arrested all the knights and confiscated the property. Under interrogation, Pyrah confessed to a series of crimes. The most grievous admission was that the order's good deeds were a cover for collusion with the enemy. That included worshipping elven gods, such as Charon, Yarila and Porevit, and Sarastra. War trophies the order had acquired in battle against the Arbonesse elves were presented as "evidence" of this betrayal. Under duress, members signed confessions stating that "raids" into enemy territory were really meetings with elf paramours.

At her execution, Pyrah recanted her signed confession. She underestimated Vermes, she said. She thought the arrest was a personal vendetta. By assuming all blame, she hoped to spare the other knights and preserve the Keyholders. She failed to see that Vermes wanted the entire order dissolved, leaving no doubt as to who was in charge of the magocracy.

"I lied and am undone by that lie," she said to the crowd. "But the greatest lie is that Keyholders aided the nation's enemy. On the contrary, we faltered in the face of it and failed you, the people of Allain, by our inaction."

The other orders fell in line quickly. Vermes's demonmarked patrol became a new military order known as the Dedicated, the only Feywarden group devoted to internal security.

COLD IRON WEAPONS

Fey monsters that have immunity or resistance to nonmagical weapons are ofttimes susceptible to cold iron weapons, so cautious adventurers should invest extra coin to plate their weapons with cold iron. You can plate cold iron onto a single metal weapon or ten pieces of metal ammunition for twice the cost of a normal weapon. This cost represents not only the price of the cold iron but the time and expertise needed to add cold iron to the weapons without making it less effective.

as clean as a breeze on a crisp autumn morning. If any order puts a premium on horsemanship over magic, it is most certainly the Defenders.

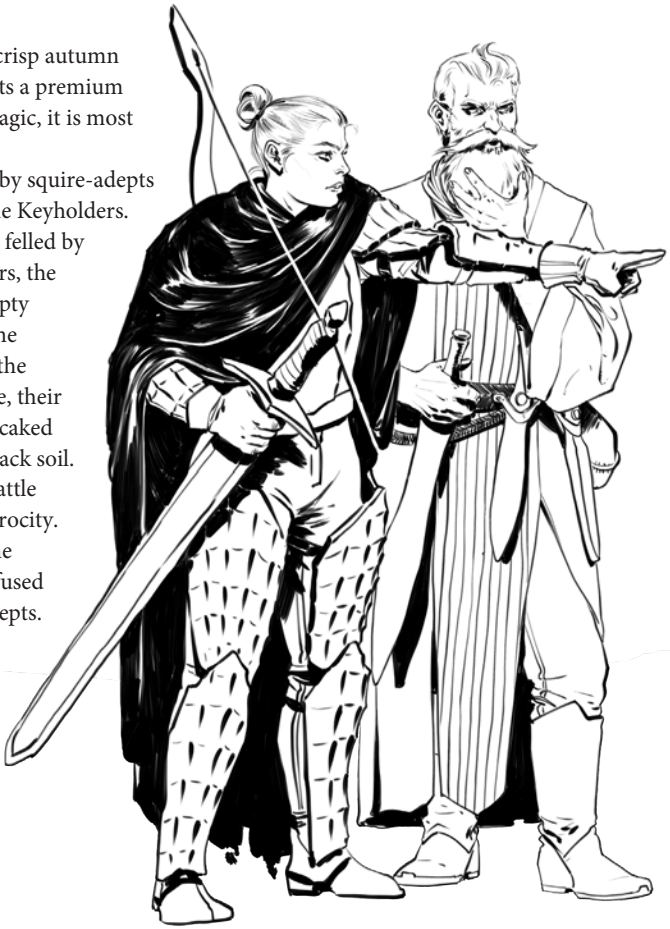
The order was founded by squire-adepts in service to knights of the Keyholders. When their masters were felled by a volley from elven archers, the youths jumped in the empty saddles and charged as one across a muddy field. By the time they reached the line, their once-white tabards were caked gray by the mud of the black soil. They turned the tide of battle with their courage and ferocity.

Despite their heroics, the Keyholder's seneschal refused to promote the squire-adepts. He said their magical training was incomplete. In protest, the squires quit the order and formed their own.

The Defenders' current grand master is the black-eyed tiefling incantrix Wahlburga, often called the Unyielding. Unlike the grand masters of other orders who delegate the task of battlefield commander, she takes the field. Her only concession to field command is to bear a *staff of frost* instead of a lance. Her personal crest—a black horse rampant—is superimposed upon the crimson star of her tabard.

LORESWORN LANCES

For purposes of guarding the Arbonesse, the Lances are considered a reserve unit. It maintains fresh horses and a rested brigade at all times at its castle south of Tintager.



The Lances are mostly concerned with missions into the goblin wastes. They have a reputation for fearlessness. In the past, the Lancers were commissioned by archmages to provide security while they investigated Dread Walker locations.

The Lances' newfound purpose is also in the Wastes, devoted to tracking down and apprehending the renegade cleric Batzas Anthemius, fighting the forces of the goblin spiritual leader Tivishta Trinkinta, or tracking forces of the goblin warlord Braagezz.

The Lances employ a host of rangers and a handful of druids. As anyone who has ridden on a Lances' expedition can attest, the rangers occupy the position of rugged, war-wise sergeants to the more refined and educated war-mage officers.

War mages in the order are expected to cultivate their intellects. This reputation for scholarship has produced some of the best histories of the Great Mage Wars. The other orders dislike the Loresworn Lances because their objective conclusions usually poke holes in the more romantic histories the various orders maintain about themselves.

Reasoner Grist, a human with Bourglund roots, is the group's grand master. Grist is encouraging war mages to take spouses and to start families. Grist believes that spousal bonds make for more determined knights.

LUMINOUS ORDER OF STARCHARGERS

Few orders are shrouded in secrecy to the extent of the Luminous Order of Starchargers. No visitors from outside the order are permitted within the sleek stone walls of its fortress, situated on a ley line northwest of Tintager, adjacent to the Arbonesse Court of Roses.

The one exception to this rule, apparently, is the cantankerous human archmage Malkot Ebonstaff, who visits whenever "the stars are in alignment." Speculation has run rampant that he is the grand master of the order, the only leader of a martial order to have a place on the Ninemage Council. Malkot makes vociferous his denials, which to the conspiracy-minded of Allain only seems to confirm their wild speculations.

In truth, the grand master is a halfling spellcaster, Toscas the Nightweaver, who hasn't left the fortress in five decades. Instead of commanding armies in the field, Toscas is preoccupied with personally training war mages in combating the dark mysteries of the void.

The order is focused on void-spawned threats, such as the Dread Walker Y'gurdraketh. The order makes many secret forays across the border to study this 100-foot-tall tentacled monstrosity.

The Starchargers have a curious standard, fashioned after the Shield of Allain. However, only one star in the circle of nine on the midnight blue field is gold, the other eight are a dark gray.

SUCCOR OF IBIS

The Succor of Ibis is different in that it promotes divine spellcasters within its ranks, an acknowledgement of the role clerics of Thoth-Hermes played in its founding.

It is also different because the order only initiates members who have been infected with a disease.

Calling themselves the Afflicted, these warrior mages are also indoctrinated into the worship of Thoth-Hermes. In a strict sense, all the warrior-mages thus become apostles of the Master of the Arcane Realms.

They vow to assist any who require healing for any diseases of the mind or body. Many of their missions are those of hospitality. Clerics of any faith (not just Thoth-Hermes) who take vows to serve as battlefield healers are cherished.

Sebni, a craggy-faced veteran campaigner, is the grand master. He is the grandson of Southlands immigrants, possessing an aptitude for abjuration magic. Influenced

by tales of his family's homeland, he has introduced the use of camels as supplementary mounts and is training aerialists in the use of griffons and pegasi.

THE DEDICATED

Most of its members are demonmarked. Each swears a personal oath of loyalty to Exarch Vermes II.

All the other orders are united in their loathing for members of the Dedicated, who enforce the tangled legal code that governs the magocracy. The Dedicated are not a police force that regulates ordinary citizens however. It is tasked with investigating infractions among the martial orders. In particular, the Dedicated takes note of the activities of the various grand masters.

Dedicated soldiers reputedly receive substandard training. The other orders consider it a nuisance, but one that cannot be underestimated. The fate of the Keyholders has never been forgotten. Still, most would prefer the Dedicated direct its considerable resources toward policing the border instead of other orders.

Destrier Doyen Nybachus Fozreh is the order's grand master. Fozreh's title to the contrary, the demonmarked warlock has never actually been seen astride a horse. His spellcasting range is not great, but the spells he does cast are delivered with great potency.

Part 3: Magic of the War Mages

A few examples of magic used by the war mages:

COMMANDER'S PAVILION

3rd-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action

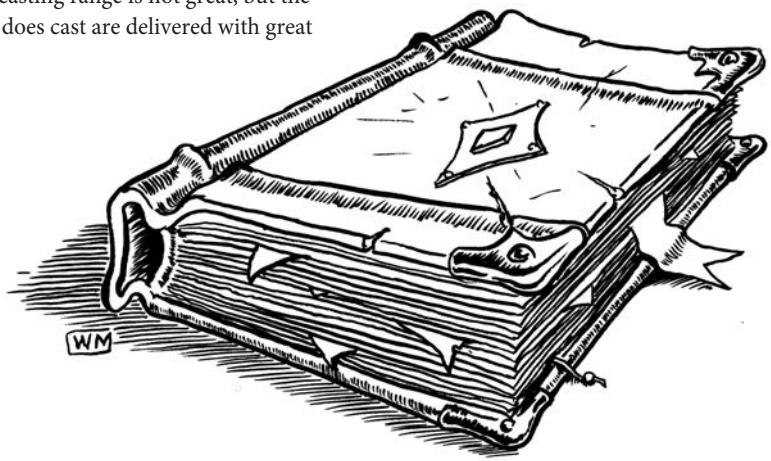
Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a tassel from a tent and a strip of cloth matching the commander's banner or uniform)

Duration: 24 hours

Creates a command tent 30 feet by 30 feet with a peak height of 20 feet. It is filled with items a military commander might require of a headquarters tent on a campaign, such as maps of the area, a spyglass, a sandglass, materials for correspondence, references for coding and decoding messages, books on history and strategy relevant to the area, banners, spare uniforms, and badges of rank. Such minor mundane items dissipate once the spell's effect ends.

Recasting the spell on subsequent days maintains the existing tent for another 24 hours.



FEATHER FIELD

1st-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when you are hit by a ranged attack by a magical weapon or targeted by an Elvish Veteran Archer's Volley

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (fletching from an arrow)

Duration: 1 round

A magical barrier of chaff in the form of feathers appears and protects you. Until the start of your next turn, you have a +5 bonus to AC against ranged attacks by magical weapons or weapons whose ranged attacks are considered magical, such as volley attacks by an elvish veteran archers or deathsworn elves*.

At Higher Levels. When you cast *feather field* using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the duration is increased by 1 round for each level.

*The elvish veteran archer is an NPC creature from *Tome of Beasts*; the deathsworn elf is a creature from *Creature Codex*.

WHO GOES THERE?

5th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (a flour sifter)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You sift the surrounding air for sound wave remnants of recent conversations to discern passwords or other important information gleaned from a conversation, such as by guards on a picket line.

The spell creates a cloud of words in the caster's mind, assigning relevance to them. Selecting the correct word or phrase is not foolproof, but you can make an educated guess.

You make a Wisdom (Perception) check against the target person's Wisdom score (DC 10, if not specified) to successfully pick the key word or phrase.

LEY LINE FUSE TRAP

Simple trap (level 5 to 10), dangerous threat

A mage who can cast a ley energy bolt at 4th level or higher can set a booby trap of knotted ley line energy along a known ley line.

Trigger. Any spellcaster who attempts to tap or harness a ley line's energy within 6 miles of the trap triggers the fuse, which comes back in 1d6 rounds.

Effect. A 60-foot cube of ley energy erupts around the original caster. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 6d8 damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful save.

Countermeasures. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a disruption in the ley field. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the magical nature of the trap. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 15) or successful *ley disruption* spell cast on the ley line destroys the trap.

Special. Casting *ley sense* does not reveal the fuse trap, only the presence of a ley line.

Author's Note: Special thanks to Ben McFarland, who served as a sounding board for discussing war mage magic.

Amidst the Dust: Hardy Survivors and Lost Relics

by Dan Dillon
(with special thanks to Brandon Hodge for his work on Sunken Empires)

Midgard's Western Wastes are a wound that will never heal, festering in the wake of the Great Mage Wars. Fine dust chokes the blasted landscape, swirling across dunes, craters, and ruins held in the grip of deadly unpredictable magic. Empires lay buried in the wasteland's dust, and beneath even those remains, echoes of lost Ankeshel rest in the cold dark.

In the shadows of the Dread Walkers and their spawn, few creatures could survive, let alone thrive. And yet, even in the wastes, life endures and flourishes. Pilgrims and priests travel to the Seat of Mavros. Scholars and explorers brave the ruins in search of power and knowledge, and the dust goblins slowly grow into a formidable power.

Druid Circle: Circle of Dust

Groups of dust goblin shamans, druids, ruin hunters, and explorers once banded together, united by their lives spent crawling the Western Wastes. These canny survivors eked out a living among the dust and unpredictable magic as they searched out lost relics from empires long buried. The Circle of Dust is the result of their study. Today, most of the Circle of Dust are dust goblins, but druids of other races brave or foolish enough to venture into the wastes to earn the circle's trust have joined their ranks.

Druids of the Circle of Dust align their magic with the unpredictable mystic nature of the wastes. They draw sustenance from it, protect against otherworldly creatures, and gather lost knowledge hidden beneath the ancient sands.

CIRCLE SPELLS

The shattered magic of the wastes infusing your being grants you knowledge of certain spells. At 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th level you gain access to the spells listed for that level in the Circle of Dust Spells table.

Once you gain access to one of these spells, you always have it prepared, and it doesn't count against the number of spells you can prepare each day. If you gain access to a spell that doesn't appear on the druid spell list, the spell is nonetheless a druid spell for you.

Circle of Dust Spells

DRUID LEVEL	SPELLS
3rd	*levitate, locate object*
5th	*create food and water, magic circle*
7th	*banishment, death ward*
9th	*hallow, legend lore*

BONUS PROFICIENCIES

At 2nd level, you gain proficiency with Ankeshelian medium armor, relics, shields, and weapons. You can wear and use Ankeshelian armor and shields made of metal.

RESONATING SHROUD

Starting at 2nd level, you gain the ability to create a field of magical energy around yourself that warps ambient magic. As an action, you can expend a use of Wild Shape to create an aura, which fills the area within 10 feet of you. While this aura is active, you gain the following benefits:

- Your melee weapon attacks deal an extra 1d6 force damage to any target they hit.
- Your AC increases by 2.
- When you cast spells with a range of touch, your reach extends to anywhere within your shroud. Other aspects of the spells are unchanged.
- When you, or an ally within your shroud, cast spells in the Western Wastes, you don't risk unstable results from your spells (see *Midgard Worldbook*).

The aura lasts for 1 hour or until you use your Wild Shape again.

OTHERWORLDLY RESONANCE

At 6th level, your mind transforms due to the twisting energies of the wastes. While your Resonating Shroud is active, you can

no longer be charmed or frightened, and aberrations must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC to attack you. An aberration that fails this save can choose a new target, or it wastes the attack.

MYSTIC ABSORPTION

At 10th level, you have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Additionally, when you take damage from a spell, you can use your reaction to absorb some of the energy. You can expend Hit Dice to regain hit points as if you finished a short rest. The maximum number of hit dice you can expend is equal to half your druid level. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

SHROUD DISRUPTION

At 14th level, your Resonating Shroud now extends to the area within 30 feet of you, and your foes treat the area within your shroud as difficult terrain. A creature hostile to you that ends its turn in your shroud takes 1d8 force damage.

Ankeshelian Relics

The devices and armaments of lost Ankeshel make use of vril technology to achieve strange effects, ranging from simple but effective all the way to nothing short of astounding. Like the batteries and weapons of Cassadega (see *Midgard Worldbook*), vanishingly few Ankeshelian relics are functional when discovered. Rather, it might take dozens of specimens of a given piece of vril technology to yield enough components for artisans to refurbish a single item. Despite its nonmagical nature, attempts to reproduce vril technology without using salvaged materials have all failed.

Ankeshelian devices, architecture, and surviving artwork often incorporate a mysterious reddish-gold metal called orichalcum. Orichalcum used in the construction of magic items or in powered vril devices seems to have a faint inner light and appears slightly translucent.

Ankeshelian weapons and armor require their own proficiency, which characters can train using the downtime training rules.

VRIL BATTERIES

All vril technology requires a power source to function, and the only such sources known to successfully power these devices are vril batteries. A vril battery is a glass cylinder of varying size, depending on how much power the battery can hold.

Inside the cylinder is a stack, or stacks, of alternating copper and orichalcum discs suspended in a briny alchemical solution. The ends of the cylinder are capped with filigreed brass, set with terminals and thumb screws that allow the battery to be plugged into a vril device, either directly or by means of a canvas-sleeved copper wire or cable. Cassadegan experts can recharge a depleted vril battery by replacing the spent discs and solution.

Vril Batteries

BATTERY	COST	RECHARGE	TOTAL CHARGES	WEIGHT
Small	150 gp	100 gp	10	1 lb.
Medium	750 gp	500 gp	25	4 lb.
Large	1,500 gp	1,000 gp	50	8 lb.
Heavy	3,000 gp	2,000 gp	100	16 lb.

Connecting or removing a vril battery from a device requires a bonus action for a small or medium battery and an action for a large or heavy battery.

Small

The smallest vril power vessel is 3 inches long and 1 inch wide. It holds 10 charges at full power.

Medium

A middle ground between convenience and capacity, a medium vril battery is 8 inches long and 2 inches wide. At full power it holds 25 charges.

Large

The most common vril battery, and the first variety discovered, is a glass cylinder about 12 inches long, and 3 inches wide. It holds 50 charges when fully powered.

Heavy

Rarest of all, heavy vril batteries are too large to connect directly to all but the largest and usually stationary vril relics. Nearly 2 feet long and 8 inches wide, these monstrous capacitors have fittings on their end caps for straps or other fasteners. They can be fitted and worn like a backpack and connected to devices by cables. A heavy vril battery has enough terminals to connect to 4 devices at one time. At full power, it holds 100 charges.

In addition to its cumbersome weight, heavy vril batteries are dangerous to carry and use. The battery has AC 15 and 20 hit points. When reduced to less than 10 hit points, it discharges an arc of lightning into the creature that damaged it with a melee attack and into the creature wearing or carrying it at the time. Each creature takes 5d4 lightning damage or half as much with a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, and the battery loses 5 charges.

If reduced to 0 hit points, the battery shatters and releases all of its remaining charge. A creature that hit it with a melee attack and a creature wearing or carrying the battery each take 1d6 lightning damage for every 2 charges the battery currently holds or half as much damage with a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw.

ANKESHELIAN ARMOR

While ancient Ankeshel likely created and employed armor of all varieties, only metal armor made of bronze, copper, orichalcum, mithral, adamantine, or other wondrous alloys survive to this day. Surviving armor must have new leather straps and fittings attached, which requires a character proficient in blacksmith's or leatherworker's tools and costs 5 gp in materials. A suit of Ankeshelian medium armor without vril technology is worth an additional 250 gp and heavy armor an extra 500 gp for their historical and collector's value.

The most prized and rare Ankeshelian armor and shields also contain vril technology.

Charged Armor

Some of the armor and shields recovered from Ankeshelian sites are outfitted with ports suitable for connecting vril batteries and strange copper and orichalcum channels and coils running along the outer surface of the bronze plates. While a vril battery is connected to a functional suit of charged armor you are wearing, you can activate the armor as a bonus action.

While active, lightning runs through the armor's channels and coils, humming softly and occasionally discharging small sparks. A creature within 5 feet of you that hits you with a melee attack takes lightning damage (1d4 for a shield, 1d6 for medium armor, 1d8 for heavy armor). Each time a creature takes damage from the armor, the armor drains 1 charge from the attached vril battery.

Ankeshelian Armor

ARMOR	COST	LIGHTNING DAMAGE	WEIGHT
Medium Armor			
Charged breastplate	1,500 gp	1d6	25 lb.
Charged half plate	2,000 gp	1d6	45 lb.
Heavy Armor			
Charged splint	2,500 gp	1d10	70 lb.
Charged plate	3,000 gp	1d10	75 lb.
Shield			
Charged shield	150 gp	1d4	8 lb.
Vril shield	1,000 gp	—	10 lb.

VRIL SHIELD

A vril shield is a small round shield, perhaps 1 foot across. Six small orichalcum disks sit along the rim of the shield with a slightly larger disk in the center. Orichalcum channels connect all the disks together. A small, medium, or heavy vril battery can attach to terminals on the back side. As a bonus action, you can activate a vril shield you are wielding. When activated, the shield drains 1 charge from the attached vril battery and projects a larger disc of crackling, translucent blue force from its face. The force shield lasts until the start of your next turn and grants you 3/4 cover.

COVER AND FACING

At the GM's discretion, attacks that originate from behind an active vril shield might reduce or eliminate the cover it provides. Use this sparingly, however, to avoid complicating combat and removing the usefulness of the feature.

ANKESHELIAN SKIFF

These vril-powered vehicles are among the rarest and most amazing Ankeshelian relics, and only a few have been restored to functional condition. Skiffs are made of shaped stone and metals. Originally mistaken for sculptures and statues, the skiffs discovered so far all appear to be stylized animals such as horses, griffons, dragons, or large sea creatures. An intact skiff has a number of metal and orichalcum levitation pads, controls, and a battery port. You can activate or deactivate a powered skiff as an action.

Operating a skiff requires proficiency in Ankeshelian vehicles. Attempting to operate a skiff without proficiency requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence check to operate any function. While operating a skiff, you can use its speed to move instead of your own.

Crew. Ankeshelian skiffs require only a single person to operate them. Sudden or complex maneuvers might require Dexterity

Ankeshelian Skiffs

SKIFF	COST	SPEED	CREW	PASSENGERS
Steed	5,000 gp	60 ft./7 mph	1	1
Carriage	10,000 gp	50 ft./6 mph	1	5
Soaring	30,000 gp	80 ft./9 mph	1	1

(Ankeshelian vehicles) checks. Skiffs are designed for Medium creatures. Small creatures might have difficulty operating the controls comfortably, and Large or larger creatures can't operate a skiff.

Passengers. The number of creatures that can ride comfortably on a skiff. Seating is designed for Medium creatures, so two Small creatures might be able to take a single seat with some discomfort.

Cargo. This indicates how many pounds of cargo the skiff can carry.

Damage Threshold. A carriage skiff has immunity to all damage unless it takes 10 or more points of damage, in which case it takes damage as normal. Any damage less than 10 is considered superficial and doesn't reduce the skiff's hit points.

Skiff Repair. Repairs to a damaged skiff can be made while the skiff is inactive. Repairing 1 hit point of damage requires 1 day and 20 gp for materials and can only be accomplished by Cassadegan artisans. A fabricate spell cast on a skiff repairs 10 points of damage.

Steed

Steed skiffs most often resemble stylized horses with two horizontal metal discs, one at the front and another at the back, in place of legs. It has a seat built into its back, foot rests where stirrups would be, and a stone and metal ring or loop in line with what would be a living animal's spine along the back of its neck. The ring is a control device a rider grips with both hands.

Behind the control ring is a cylindrical port that can accept a small, medium, or large vril battery. A heavy battery can be connected to it with a cable, but the immense battery can't fit into the port. It drains 1 charge per hour while active and hovers between six inches and a maximum of 10 feet off the ground. It has a speed of 60 feet and ignores ground-based difficult terrain such as mud or rubble. It can move over water and other liquids but can't climb vertical surfaces. Steep slopes are difficult terrain.

Carriage

A carriage skiff is a much larger version of the steed. Instead of a saddle-like seat, it has a recessed compartment with seats for a driver and passenger and a larger cabin or bed in the rear. The bed has room for additional passengers or cargo. The compartments provide half cover to creatures sitting in them.

This larger vehicle has six levitation pads. The battery port can hold any size vril battery, and the carriage skiff drains 2 charges per hour while active. It has a speed of 50 feet with the same movement restrictions as the steed skiff.

Some carriage skiffs have enclosed crew and cargo compartments with hatches that create airtight seals. These varieties can dive underwater with a swimming speed of 50 feet and produce fresh air while the compartments are sealed. While sealed and producing air, the carriage skiff drains a total of 3 charges per hour.

Soaring

Soaring skiffs are the rarest of all Ankeshelian skiffs with the number of functioning specimens in the single digits.

PASSENGERS	CARGO (POUNDS)	AC	HP	DAMAGE THRESHOLD
1	250	17	50	—
5	1,000	17	75	10
1	250	17	50	—

They appear similar to steed skiffs with their appearance resembling avian creatures rather than horses but with an additional levitation pad. A soaring skiff can function as a steed skiff with a speed of 80 feet, or you can cause it to fly with a speed of 80 feet (hover). While flying, a soaring skiff drains 3 charges per hour.

ANKESHELIAN WEAPONS

In addition to the more common Cassadegan coil rifle (see *Midgard Worldbook*), several varieties of ancient vril weaponry have surfaced in the sunken and buried ruins of Ankeshel. Most of these weapons are enhanced melee weapons that draw on vril batteries to fuel their destructive components, but skilled experts have recently restored a few new vril ranged weapons.

Ankeshelian weapons require vril batteries to function. A one-handed weapon can accept a small vril battery directly or any other size battery with a cable. A two-handed weapon can accept up to a large vril battery directly and a heavy battery via cable.

Charged Weapon

Ankeshelian melee weapons have copper and orichalcum coils built into their blades or heads with small terminals for vril battery connections. You can activate or deactivate a charged weapon you're holding as a bonus action. When you hit a creature with an active charged weapon, the creature takes an extra 1d8 lightning. Each hit drains 1 charge from the attached vril battery.

Coil Revolver

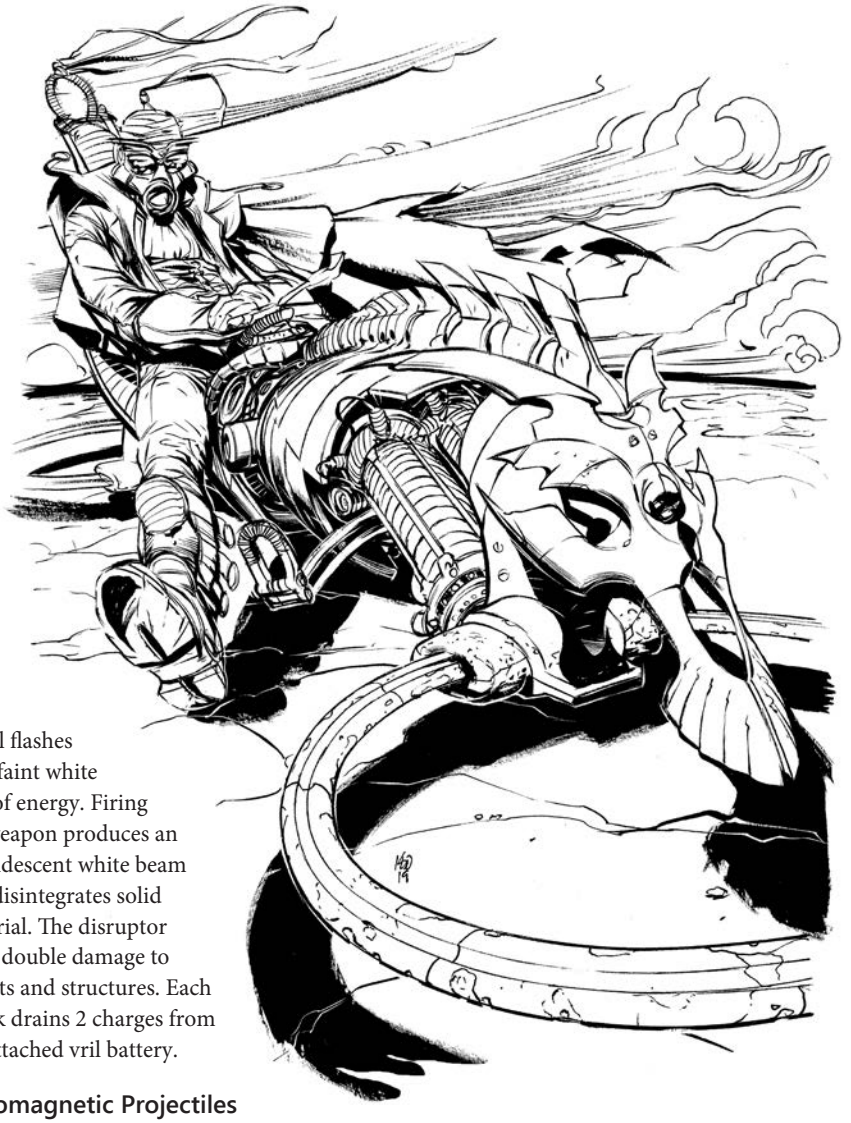
This sophisticated vril pistol is heavy and ornate. It fires ferromagnetic projectiles at high speed using magnetic coils in its barrel. A revolving cylinder in the center of the weapon holds 5 shots, and each attack drains 1 charge from an attached vril battery. It takes an action to load 5 new shots into the cylinder.

Disruptor

A bulky, rifle-like weapon with ornate copper and orichalcum filigree. When connected to a charged vril battery, the disruptor hums softly, and the thick

Ankeshelian Weapons

ARMOR	COST	DAMAGE	WEIGHT	PROPERTIES
Melee Weapons				
Charged weapon	+500 gp	As base weapon plus 1d8 lightning	As base weapon plus 1 lb.	Charged
Powered weapon	+1,000 gp	As base weapon	As base weapon plus 2 lb.	Powered
Ranged Weapons				
Coil Revolver	5,000 gp	1d10 piercing	5 lb.	Ammunition (range 30/90), special
Disruptor	8,000 gp	2d8 force	10 lb.	Range 100/300, special, two-handed
Ammunition				
Ferromagnetic projectiles (10)	10 gp	—	—	—



barrel flashes with faint white arcs of energy. Firing the weapon produces an incandescent white beam that disintegrates solid material. The disruptor deals double damage to objects and structures. Each attack drains 2 charges from the attached vril battery.

Ferromagnetic Projectiles

Round balls crafted with a secret formula of specially charged iron. The projectiles react to the magnetic fields created by coil rifles and revolvers and are propelled at high speed when fired.

Powered Weapon

These melee weapons incorporate orichalcum filigree and discs into their blades or heads with terminals for vril battery connections. You can activate or deactivate a powered weapon you're holding as a bonus action. When you hit a creature with an active powered weapon, the creature must succeed on a Strength saving throw (DC equal to 8 + the ability modifier you used for the weapon's attack + your proficiency bonus) or fall prone. Each hit drains 2 charges from the vril battery.

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